

Your pastor has a family. Sometimes the congregation forgets. Sometimes even the pastor seems to forget. If the pastor is single, relatives and close friends are the family. Each member of that family--as each member of your family--has needs to be met and potentials to be developed.

## History and Background

Peter preached, recalling Genesis and God's promise to Abraham, "In your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Acts 3:25). So we become one family in Christ, caring for every member of the body.

Sometimes a pastor's family may feel that the church members are the pastor's family, because they seem to have more impact on the pastor. Whenever they call, whatever they want, the pastor seems to be ready to counsel, teach, preach and visit. Because pastors care about what they do, it often is difficult for them to turn people away who crowd into family time. More and more pastors, however, are scheduling regular time away from their pastoral duties for their families in addition to time for themselves.

There are great rewards in the pastor's home. Children have access to a parent at times other children can't reach theirs. They understand what their parent, who is a pastor, does more clearly than children whose parents "go to the office." But there may be a sense of intrusion, especially when the pastor's family lives in a parsonage.

To fulfill its meaning and purpose, a family:

- Brings love and support.
- Gives continuity.
- Influences lifestyle.
- Faces daily problems and opportunities for growth.
- To be strong, a family must have members who:
  - Provide love and support.
  - Offer continuity to those they love.
  - Make room for other family members.
- Give the time and concern necessary to work out problems and grow as a family member.

## You and Your Pastor's Family

Being a strong family is really up to the members of the pastor's family. However, you can help by:

- Providing adequate salary, insurance, pension and housing allowances so that the family feels secure.
- Seeing that there is adequate vacation time and encouraging the pastor to use it away from all duties. Most conferences recommend a month each year.
- Protecting your pastor's time by telephoning him or her at the church during the day except in an emergency.
- Expecting your pastor to have time off during the week to compensate for evening and weekend events and duties.

- Letting the pastor know you affirm the need for time to relax and rest, to learn and be with family and friends.
- Speaking out and objecting when others have unreasonable expectations of the pastor.
- Letting your pastor know in advance when you want or need to come by her or his home. If you must drop in unexpectedly, keep it brief, especially if it is near mealtime, bedtime or another time clearly set aside for family. Don't comment on the condition of the house, unless something deserves a particular compliment.
- Being sensitive to visiting expectations. The parsonage need not be seen as a monastery or museum. Some pastors want visitors, keep an open door and invite drop-in calls; others don't. Take your clues from the pastor.
- Loving, forgiving and enjoying the pastor's family as part of your own family rather than as a model family. A model family may not live in your pastor's home. The pressure on spouse and children to be and do good may limit friendships, social life and comfortable movement in the church, school and community. This is true especially if they are challenged by some in the church to be "goody-goodies" and by some outside the church to prove that they are not.
- Letting the pastor and his or her spouse know that you do not expect the kind of dedication from the pastor's family that you do from the pastor. Often they perceive

expectations from the congregation which aren't there.

- Discouraging discussions of the pastor's family and friends and their behavior.
- Being supportive of the pastor's family in time of stress.
- Recognizing that pastors who are not married need time to be with their family or support community. This may be even harder to schedule than for people who live with their family.

## The Spouse's Role

Among many parishioners, there remains the assumption that the spouse of the pastor will work nearly as long and hard for the church as the pastor. Some do. But they do so as volunteers. If your church expects your pastor and spouse to function as a team in ministry, it should make these expectations clear from the start. If regular duties are expected from a spouse or other family member, it is appropriate for employment with appropriate compensation to be arranged. Once a pastor is called, unless other arrangements have been made, the spouse's participation in the life of the congregation is by personal choice. This participation in church should be invited, but it cannot be demanded.

Though pastors' salaries have improved, they remain well below most professionals, often making it necessary for the spouse to work outside the home. It is inappropriate

for a secular employer to base salary on whether or not there is another source of income in the household. The church should maintain this standard as well.

## Issues Facing the Church

- There are different expectations of women in our society than of men. How does this affect the pastor who is a woman? Wife? Mother?
- What are advantages and disadvantages of living in a parsonage? Which seems to make the most sense in your church's situation? How does that seem from your pastor's point of view?
- What pastors do for their own pastoral care is not always clear. Sometimes pastors become too dependent upon their spouses or let problems drag on. What does your pastor do for pastoral care?
- Pastors often don't have a salary comparable to that of most of their parishioners or professionals in the community, yet they may be expected to maintain a similar lifestyle. What are the effects of this situation?
- While it can be easy and fun to care for your pastor's family in good times, there are difficult times when things break down. How can you be loving and helpful in these times?

## Questions

- Does your church provide adequate salary and benefits for your pastor?
- Do you have any expectations of the pastor's family that you need to modify or eliminate?
- What is one thing you can do to help your pastor's family?

## Action Suggestions

- If you don't have a pastoral relations committee, establish one. You can start by reviewing **The Pastoral Relations Committee**, a booklet from Parish Life and Leadership, available for download from the Leadership section of [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)
- Review your Conference's guidelines for pastoral compensation. How are these guidelines determined?